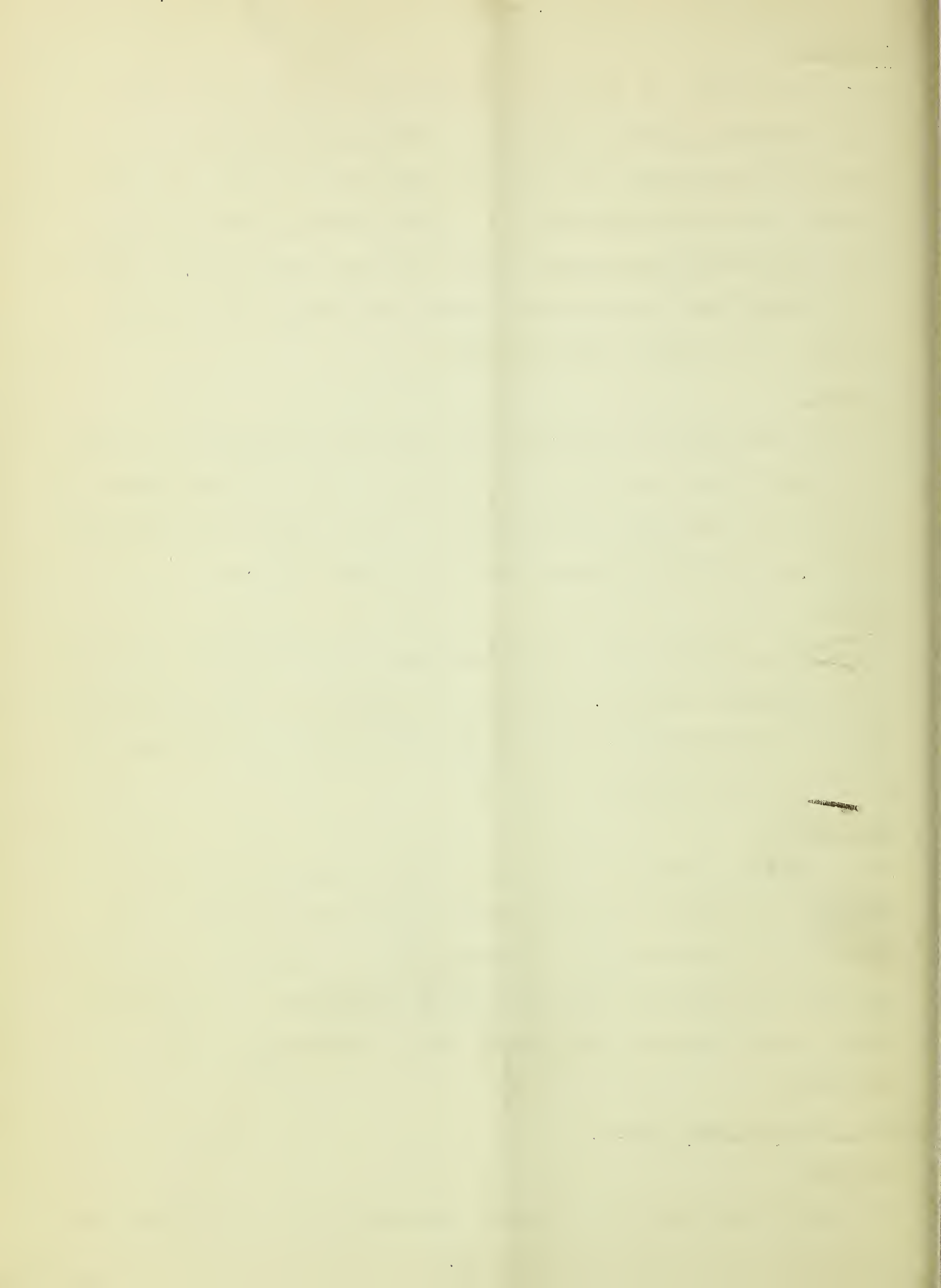


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F O R T U N E S    W A S H E D    A W A Y

"CROP RESIDUES"

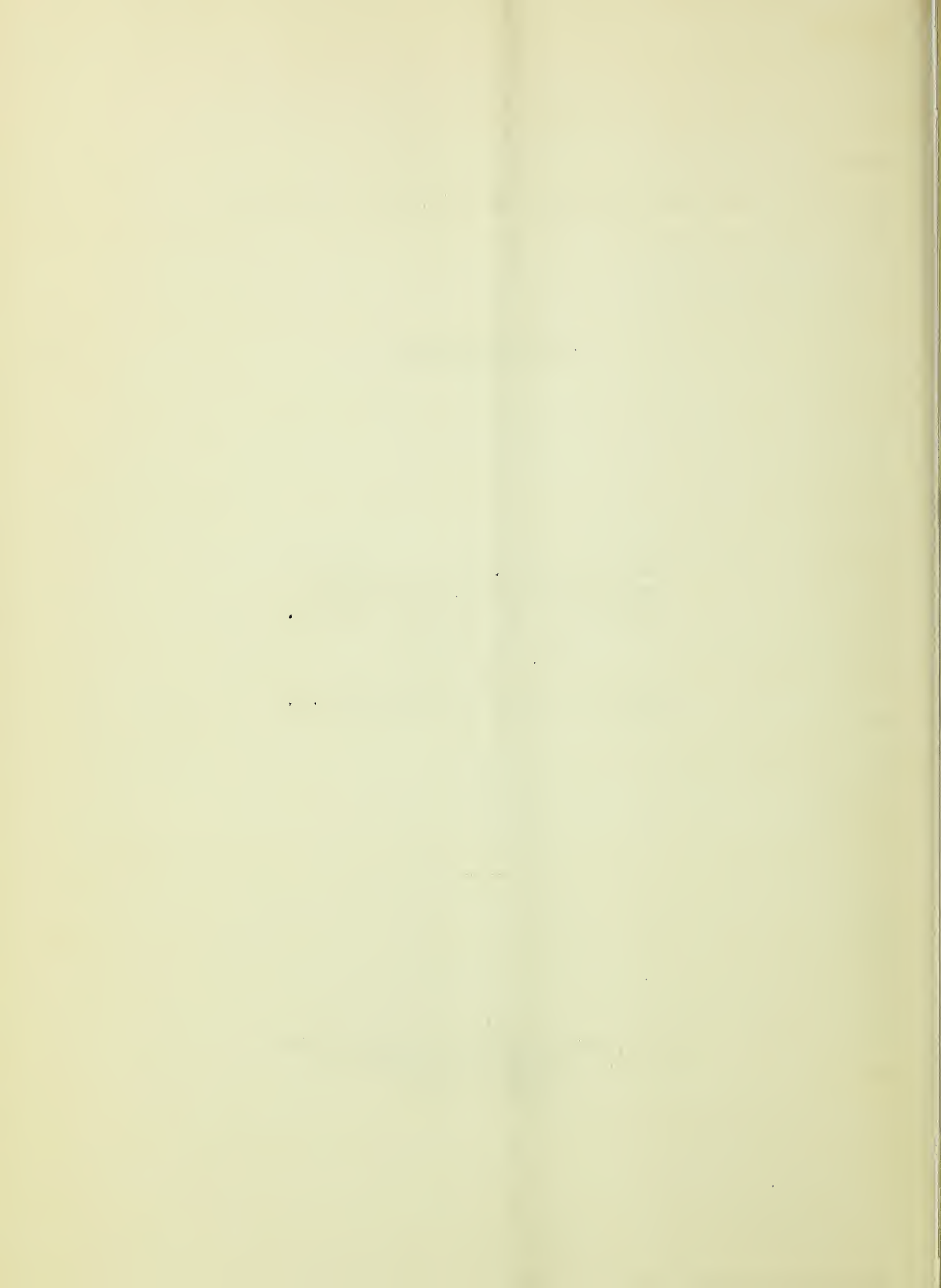
Broadcast No. 46 in a series  
of discussions of soil con-  
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

March 11, 1939 6:45-7:00 p.m.

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE  
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ALLISON

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ALLISON

Interwoven with the story of Indiana and the nation, the story of Solon Robinson presents a fascinating panorama of American agriculture. Solon Robinson spent most of his life in Indiana, where he founded the ill-fated town of Solon in Jennings County; where he founded the more famed Crown Point and became the leading citizen of Lake County. Nationally known as an experimental farmer, traveler, lecturer, and agricultural writer, Robinson was born in Connecticut. He loved to reminisce of his boyhood days in...

ROBINSON (voice out of past)

The land of rocks, and hills, and gravelly knolls,  
Stone walls, and wells, where oaken buckets swing;  
Where rivers rapid run, and where tide water rolls;  
And back on mem'ry's page, the scenes of childhood bring.

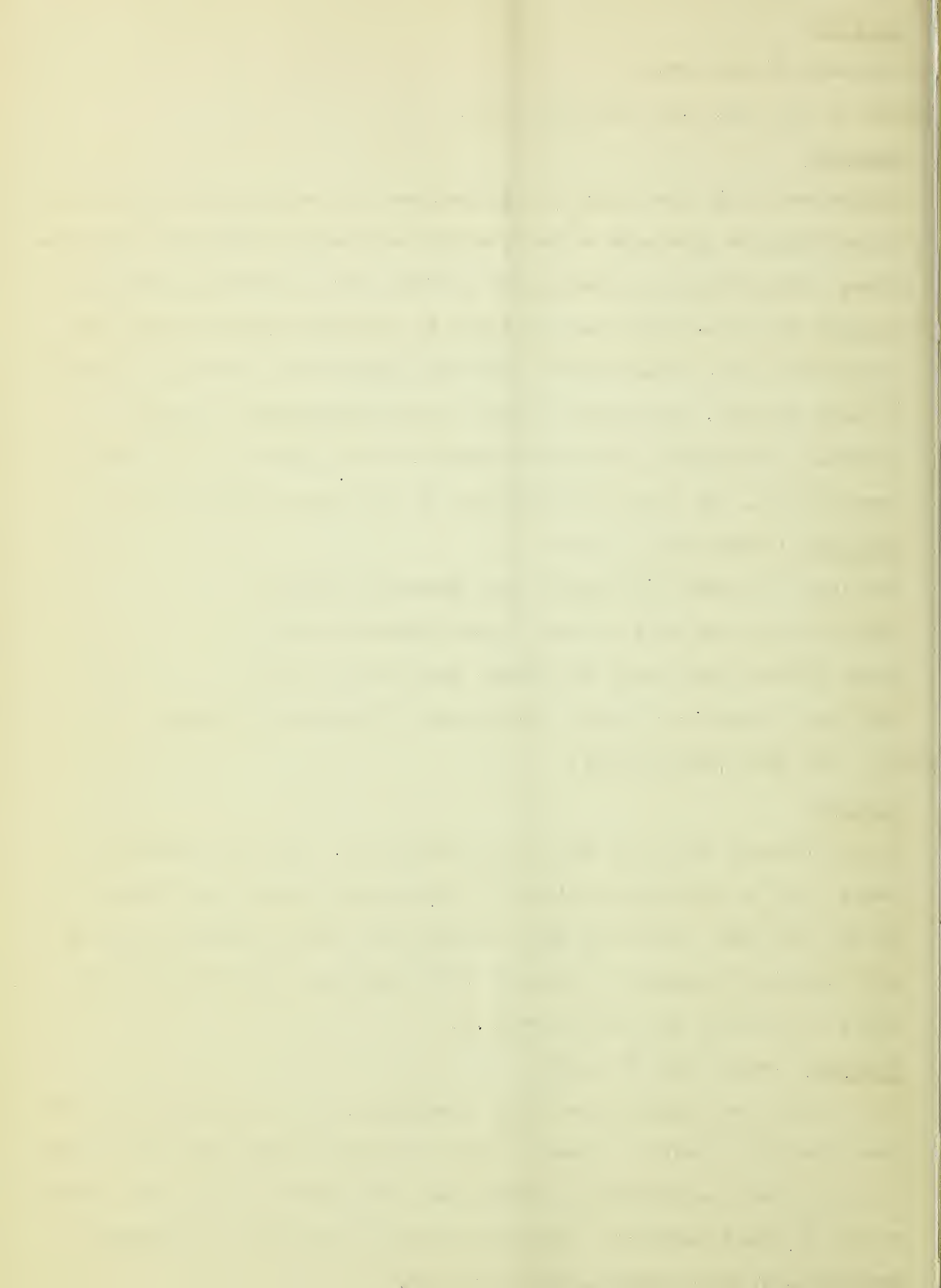
ORGAN: THE OLD OAKEN BUCKET.

ALLISON

Solon Robinson won fame as an agriculturist. Over one hundred years ago, he advocated scientific principles which are truisms in our own day: ditching and draining wet land, planting grasses and building terraces to prevent soil erosion, crop diversification, using lime and fertilizers...

ROBINSON (voice out of past)

Talk about the legislature doing something, I'll tell you what I'd have them do. Paint a great parcel of guide boards, and nail them up over every legislature, church, and schoolhouse door, with these words in great letters: "The best land in America, by constant cropping, without manure, will run out."





ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

ALLISON

Many an American farmer has learned the value of utilizing fertilizer, straw, crop residues--materials sometimes considered trash!--to build up the soil. Such a farmer is Morgan Davidson, of Fulton County, Kentucky. In 1935.....

SOUND: Beating rain, whistling wind, then crash of window pane, and wind and rain grow louder.

WARREN

Joe! Oh, Joe! This window pane's blown out. Get a hammer and some boards and nail it up!

JOE (off mike)

Yessuh, Mistuh Graham.

DAVIDSON

Can I help, Warren?

WARREN

No, thanks, Mr. Davidson. Joe will fix it up all right. Let's go back in the back of the store where it's warmer.

DAVIDSON

Suits me. It's a bad morning outside. (fade)

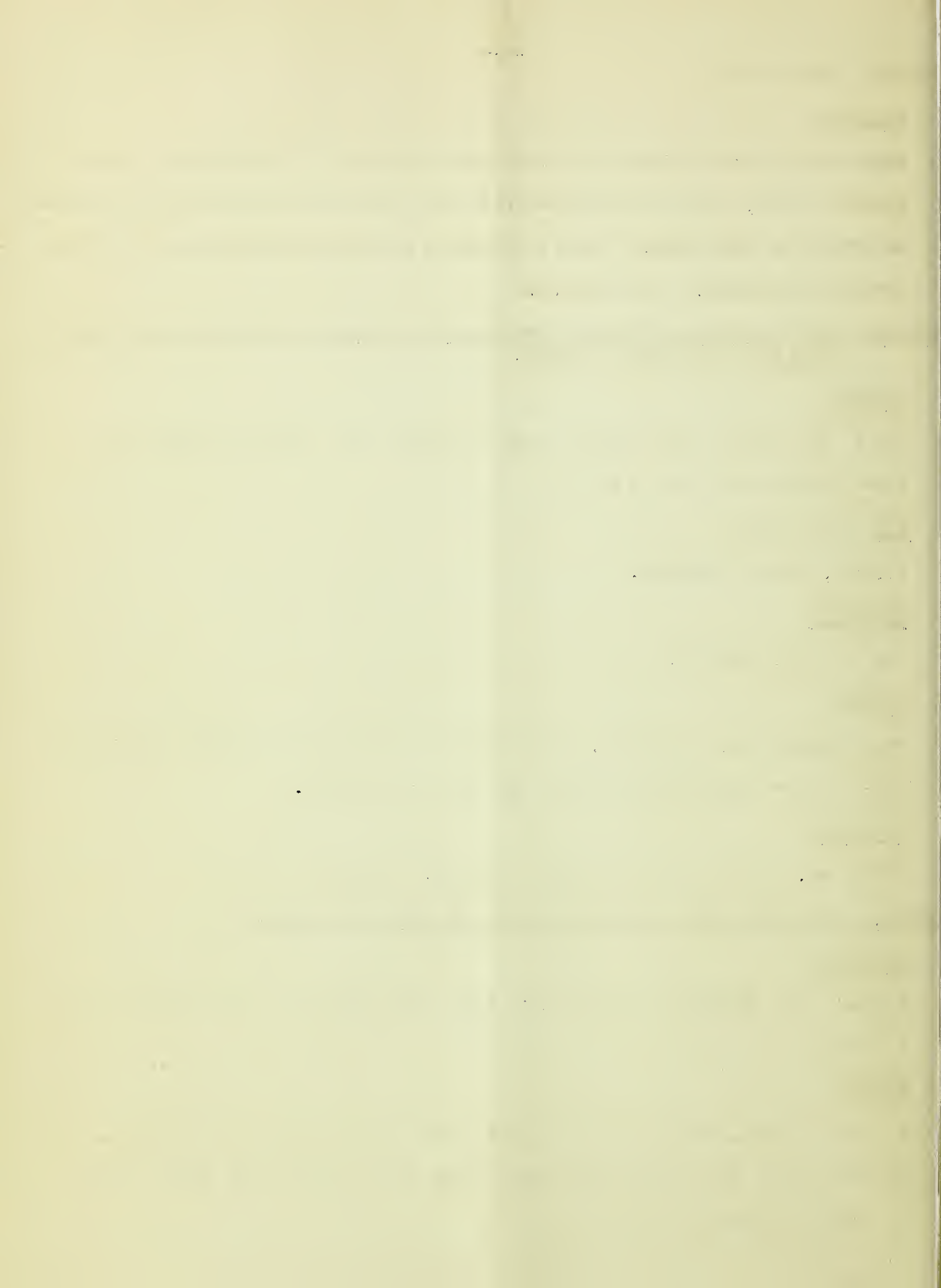
SOUND: Wind and rain gradually fade as men walk away.

DAVIDSON

I tell you, Warren, a rain like this can tear the very devil out of a farm.

WARREN

I know it can, and a lot of farms can't stand any more washing. Things are a whole lot different than they used to be right here in Fulton County.





DAVIDSON

That's a fact. Why, it hasn't been many years since we grew so much red clover that the seed was so cheap it wasn't worth growing.

WARREN

And now the farmers have a hard time even getting it to grow. I've had quite a lot of trouble with that little 40-acre farm I bought outside of town. Course, I can't pay it as much time as I should. The hardware store keeps me busy.

DAVIDSON

I've got a peck of troubles with that back field--you know the one.

WARREN

Yeah, that poor field has just been cropped too much.

DAVIDSON

Cropped too much is right. Why, my dad would have thought he was going broke if he couldn't get 40 bushels of wheat to the acre off it. But it's gone now. That soil just picks up and runs off.

WARREN

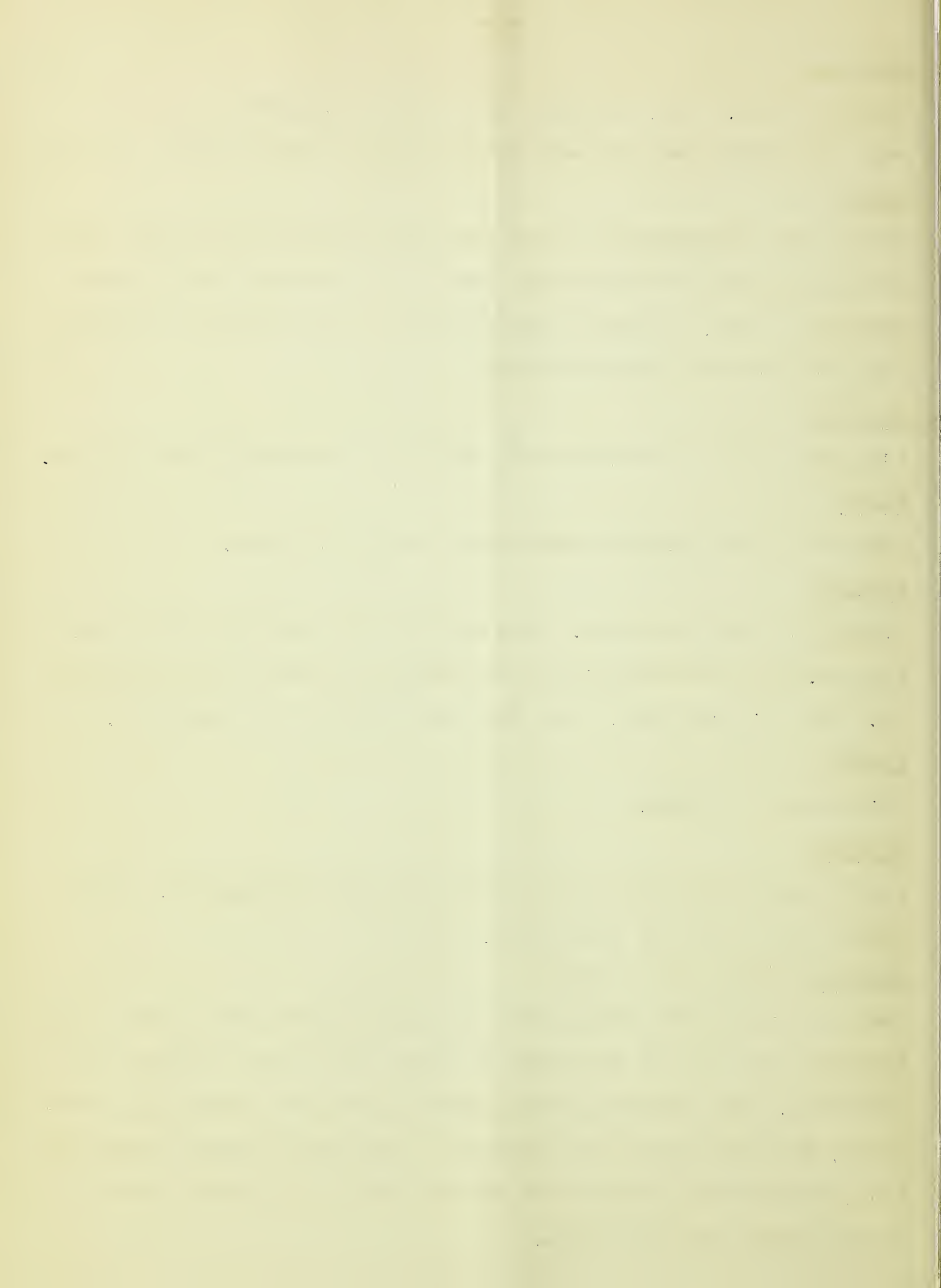
It's poor, all right.

DAVIDSON

Poor? Poor? It's so poor it won't even grow ticklegrass. Job's turkey was fat by the side of it.

ROBINSON (voice out of past)

Even now, before the stumps of the original forest have disappeared, thousands and tens of thousands of acres have become gullied and abandoned. The skinning system seems to have been thoroughly practiced, until the fertility has been so completely skinned from the soil, the present farmers find some difficulty in raising enough to keep their own skins full.



SOUND: Motor truck idling, then cut off.

DAVIDSON

This ought to be a good place to start, Sam.

SAM

Yessuh, Mistuh Davidson. But I sho' am up in the air as to what you're gonna do.

DAVIDSON

Swing that first barrel of scraps over this way and I'll show you.

SOUND: Scraping of heavy steel barrel over bed of truck.

DAVIDSON

There. That's all right.

SAM

Yessuh.

DAVIDSON

Why, Sam, my son-in-law, Warren Graham told me about these scraps.

SAM

Yessuh, I knowed you got 'em from Mistuh Thacker over at the packin' plant, but I don't see no sense in haulin' 'em way out heah.

DAVIDSON

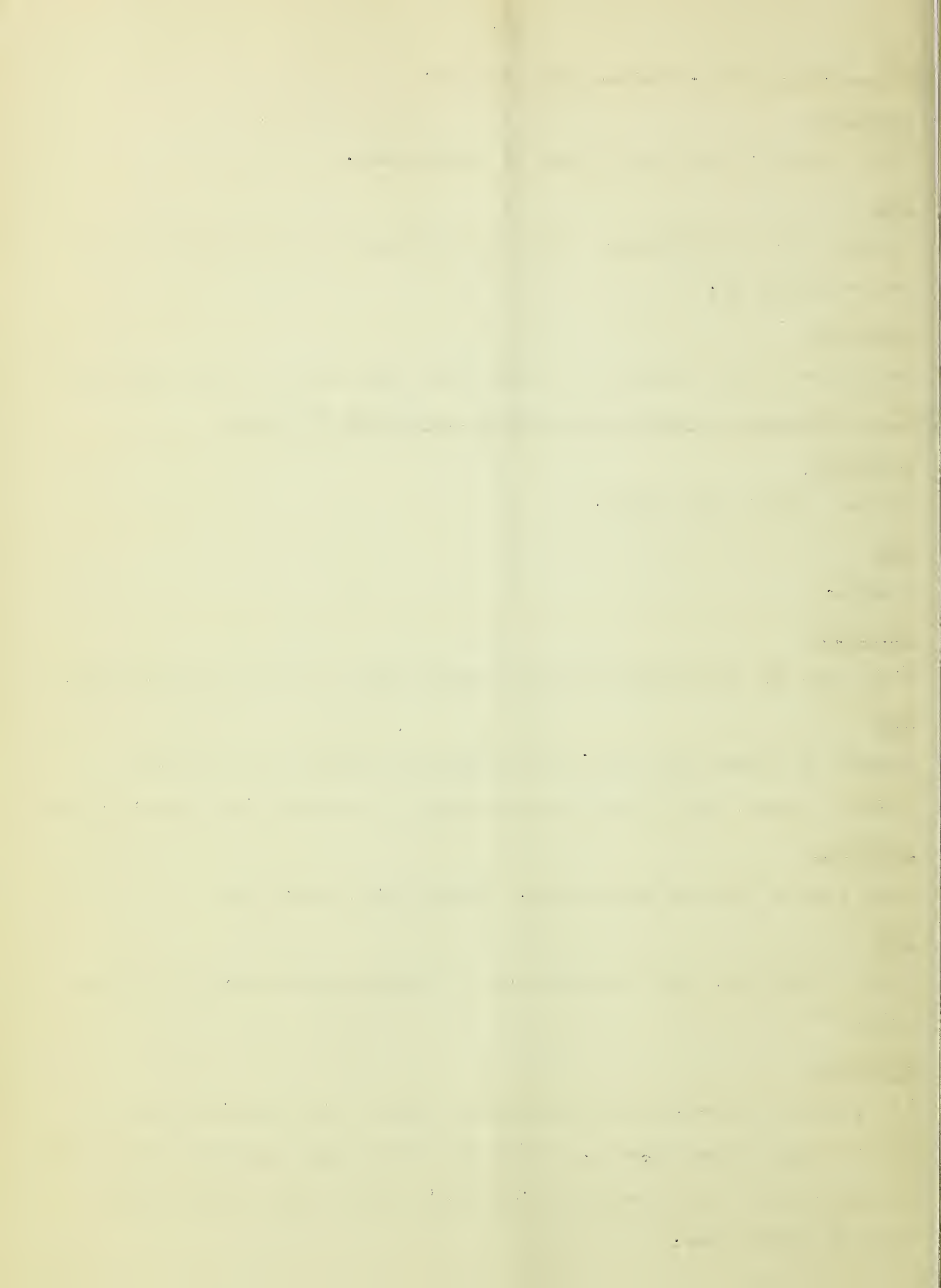
Just take a look at that field. Kinda thin, ain't it?

SAM

Thin? Glory be, Old Uncle Ned was a hippopotamus along side that soil.

DAVIDSON

I'm going to fertilize the tarnation out of it, but I'm going to get it back to red clover. We've got this truck load of scraps and garbage, and I don't see why they won't be as rich as any other kind of fertilizer.



SAM

I s'pose so.

DAVIDSON

I'm going to try it, anyway. You see, Sam, every time you grow a crop on the land, you take something out of it. Some people think that the soil won't never wear out. I've found out that it will, unless you keep building it up. Every time you take something out, put something back.

ROBINSON (voice out of past)

You would suppose that some imagine that the soil can never deteriorate, to see them setting fire to immense piles of straw to get it out of the way. You can easily imagine how long the best soil will last under such a system of cultivation.

SOUND: Radio music playing softly (preferably rural music).

SOUND: Door opens and closes.

DAVIDSON

Oh, it's you, Warren. Dixon drive out with you?

WARREN

No, she went over to Mayfield with some of the folks. I thought I'd run out and get a few things.

DAVIDSON

Fine. I'm glad you did.

SOUND: Radio cuts off.

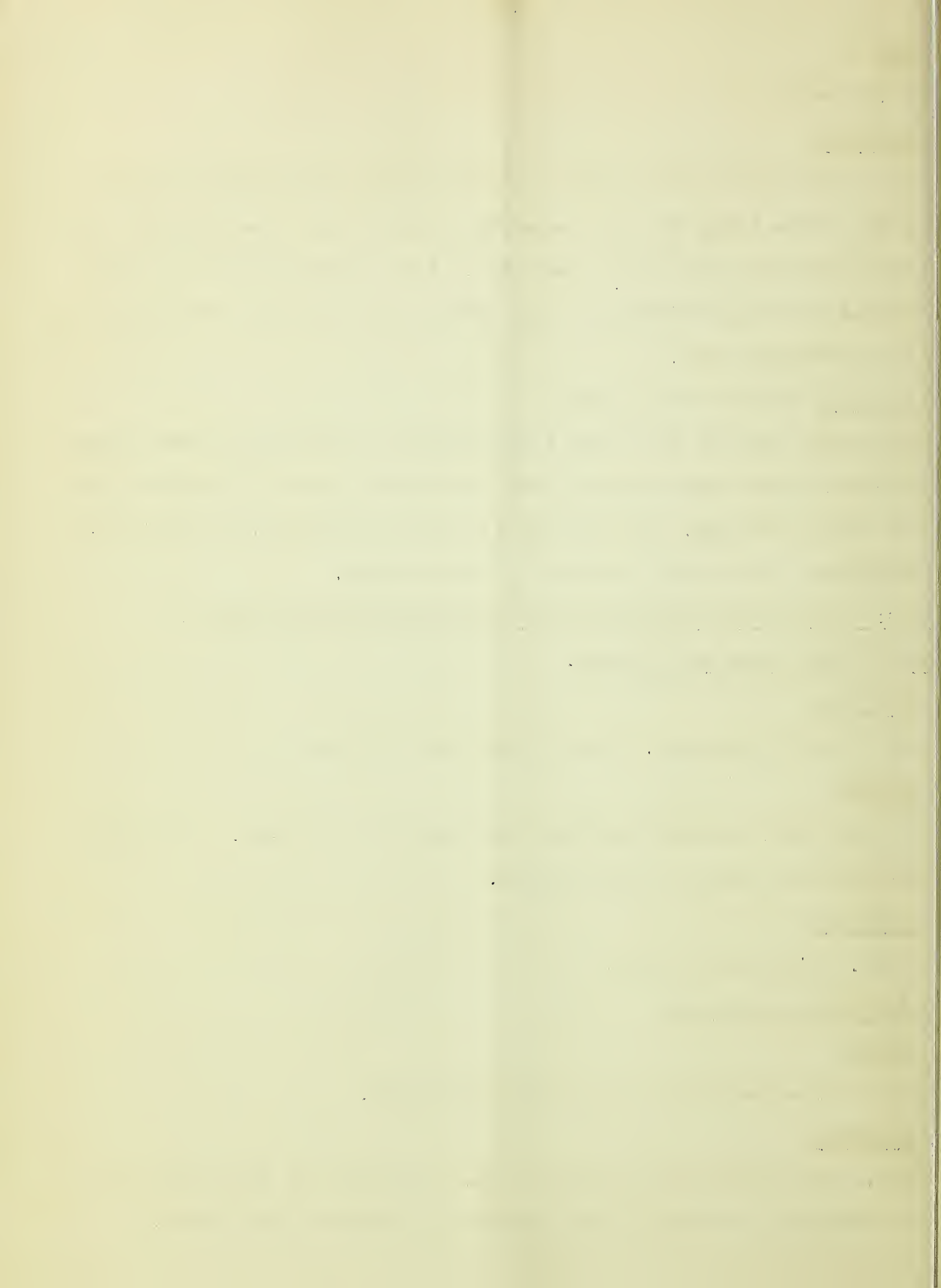
WARREN

Oh! Leave the radio on. I like it myself.

DAVIDSON

Guess I'd better let it rest a bit. You know me, about all I do in weather like this is sit around and listen to the radio.





WARREN

It's mighty nice to have on the farm.

DAVIDSON

And it's mighty nice to have a farm, too. I'll declare, a few years ago I thought I was going to see my farm just walk right off and leave me.

WARREN

Yes, you sure made an improvement in that back field. You've got it in "jap" pasture now, haven't you?

DAVIDSON

And a good stand of "jap"! Man, there ain't any comparison between the land, then and now.

WARREN

I remember. You had a lot of gullies in that field.

DAVIDSON

A lot of ditches and sheet erosion--well, the soil had all slipped off it, and had left the land to nothing.

WARREN

I don't blame you for being worried.

DAVIDSON

And I was worried, Warren. I was just like other farmers. I had sunk a lot of money in my land and had to do something.

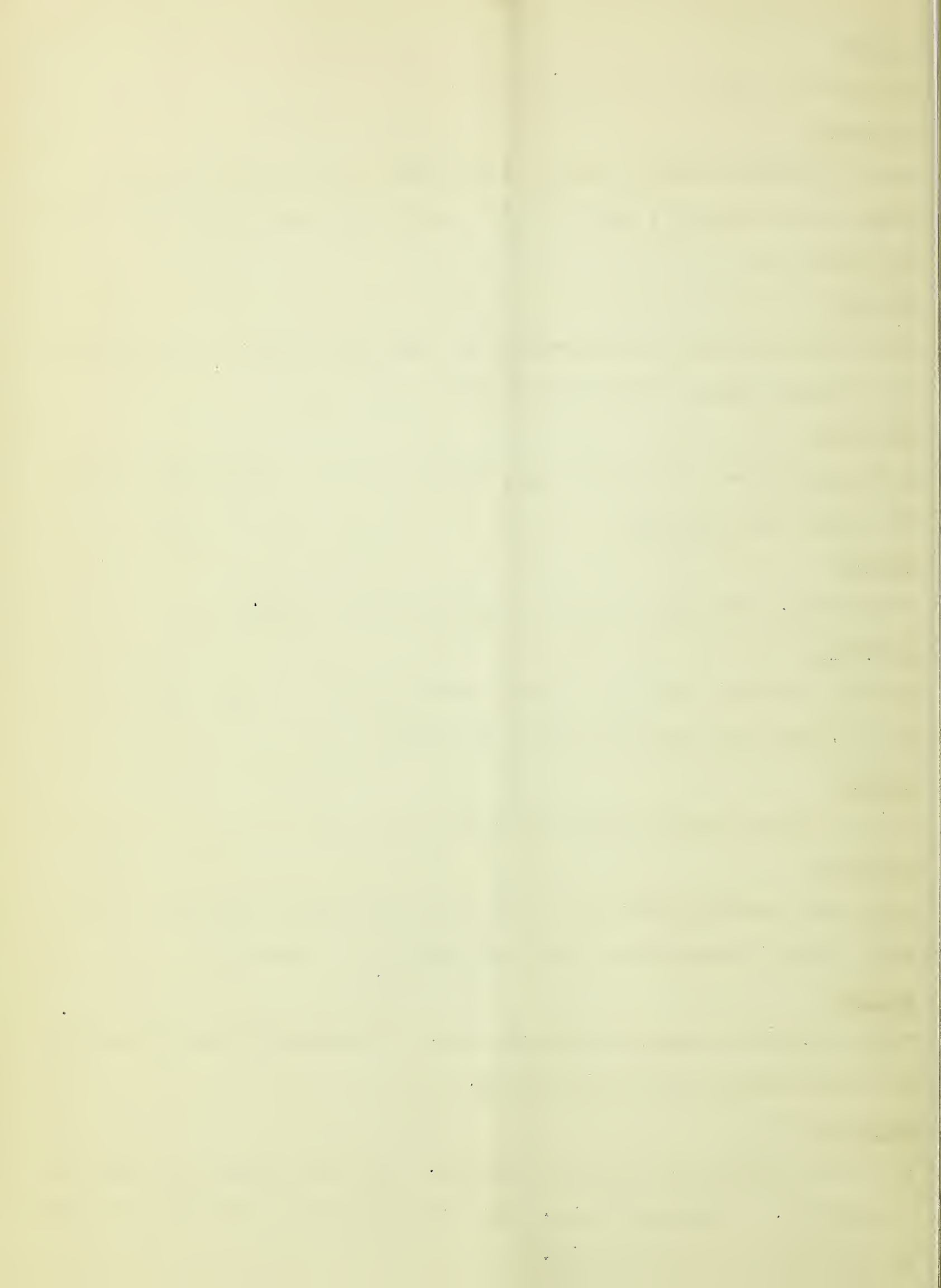
WARREN

That fertilizer really worked for you. I thought it would, because it helped me out on my little farm.

DAVIDSON

I'd used commercial fertilizer before. And this time, I absolutely covered it. I wrapped it up. Then I sowed wheat, and man, I corked up the ditches like a bottle.





WARREN

I was amazed when I saw that wheat. Some of it higher than a man's head. And you wouldn't have gotten any wheat off it if it hadn't been fertilized.

DAVIDSON

I wouldn't have got anything--not even any "poor Joe." But I will from now on. Warren, four generations of Davidsons have lived on this land. I'd sure hate for anybody to ever point to me as the one that skinned it.

ROBINSON (voice out of past)

By the judicious use of manure, marl, and lime, poor, worn-out farms have been doubled in value. And although we may be taught by the help of others, we can never be wise but by our own wisdom. Self exertion leads to self education. Thus, we may improve the soil, as well as the mind.

ORGAN: LULLABY OF THE LEAVES.

ALLISON

Thus, Morgan Davidson, of Fulton, Kentucky, learned and appreciated the wisdom of returning organic matter, life-giving humus, to the soil that gives us--our life.

ORGAN: LULLABY OF THE LEAVES.

ALLISON

And now, here is Ewing Jones, of the Dayton, Ohio, office of the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture.



JONES

Thank you, Paul Allison. In this country of ours, there are a lot of men who own farms. Unfortunately, some of them take the attitude that this is my land. I can do anything I want to with it. If I want to wear it out, and throw it into the discard, that's my business. Happily, those men are few. On the other side, there are men who look upon land ownership as a stewardship. One of those men is Ralph M. Kriebel, biologist of the Soil Conservation Service at Bedford, Indiana. Ralph, that attitude is so natural to you, that it may seem somewhat strange that I ask you to explain it. But, will you?

KRIEBEL

Ewing, I've had that feeling all of my life, and it is natural. When I was a boy back in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, my father gave it to me. His attitude was just this: This is my land. I love my land. I will never do anything to hurt it. I will do anything I can to improve it, and to pass it on to those who will follow after me.

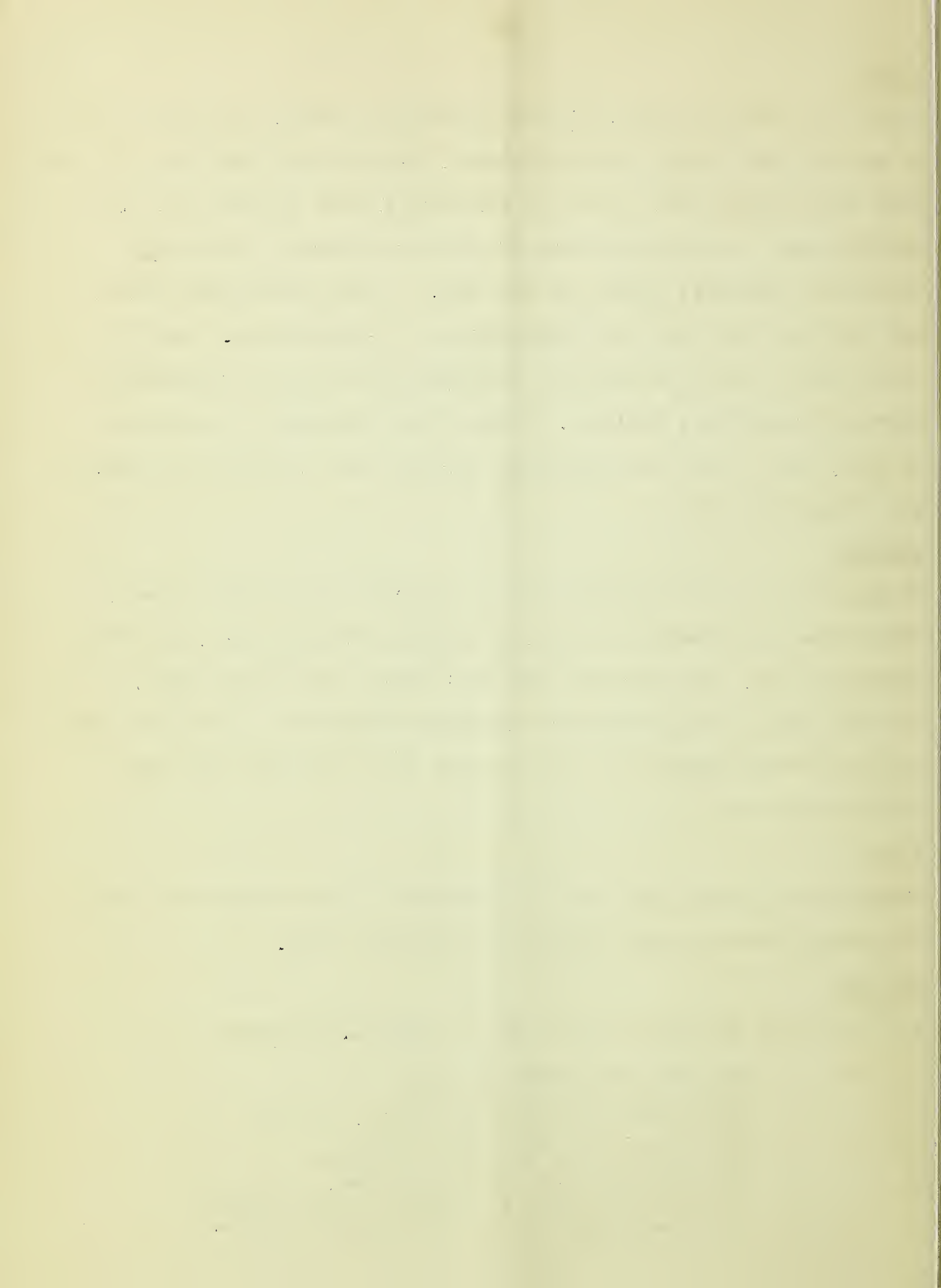
JONES

That feeling, then, was sort of like that of the old man who built the bridge after he had crossed to the other side.

KRIEBEL

Yes, and like the spirit expressed by Bert L. Robinson:

"The old man plants a tree;  
With pain now does he bend  
And kneel to spread the roots. Not he  
Nor any of his age shall spend  
One single hour beneath its shade  
Nor eat its fruit that is to be,  
For soon he shall be subject to the spade;  
Yet graciously the old man plants a tree."





JONES

That's a beautiful thought, Ralph, and a beautiful practice. After all, there's a direct relationship between man and the soil--and with the animals and plants that grow upon it.

KRIEBEL

Yes, no living thing exists independently. A study as specific as the study of the chestnut tree, of the large mouthed bass, or of the bobwhite quail, is still a study of the air and the water and the soil.

JONES

And there's a direct relationship between man's stewardship of the soil and our social life.

KRIEBEL

Exactly. On one side we have homes, roads, schools. On the other, eroded fields, broom sedge, poverty grass, sassafras, silted waters. You can easily see the interrelation. Man derives his living from and conducts his social affairs in the physical environment. And in this environment, the most important thing is the soil from which he obtains his food, his clothing and his shelter.

JONES

Too, man receives inspiration as well as physical necessities from the soil he occupies. The powerful influence of the landscape is reflected in both song and literature.

KRIEBEL

The mere presence of the hills, the forests, the plains, the plants, and the animals is enough. They allow man a diversion from phases of life which can become quite monotonous. But we're interested in our environment for other reasons--dollars and cents reasons.





JONES

Granted. But what have we done to our forests and to our soil?

KRIEBEL

Yes, what have we done to the forests? What is still being done to them, and to the soil--soil that was once thick with tall trees. What has become of the forest stream--clear, tumbling, and cold? What has become of the animals that used to inhabit them? Have we planned for future generations? In the words of Russell Lord, "How can a people do such things to their own country?"

JONES

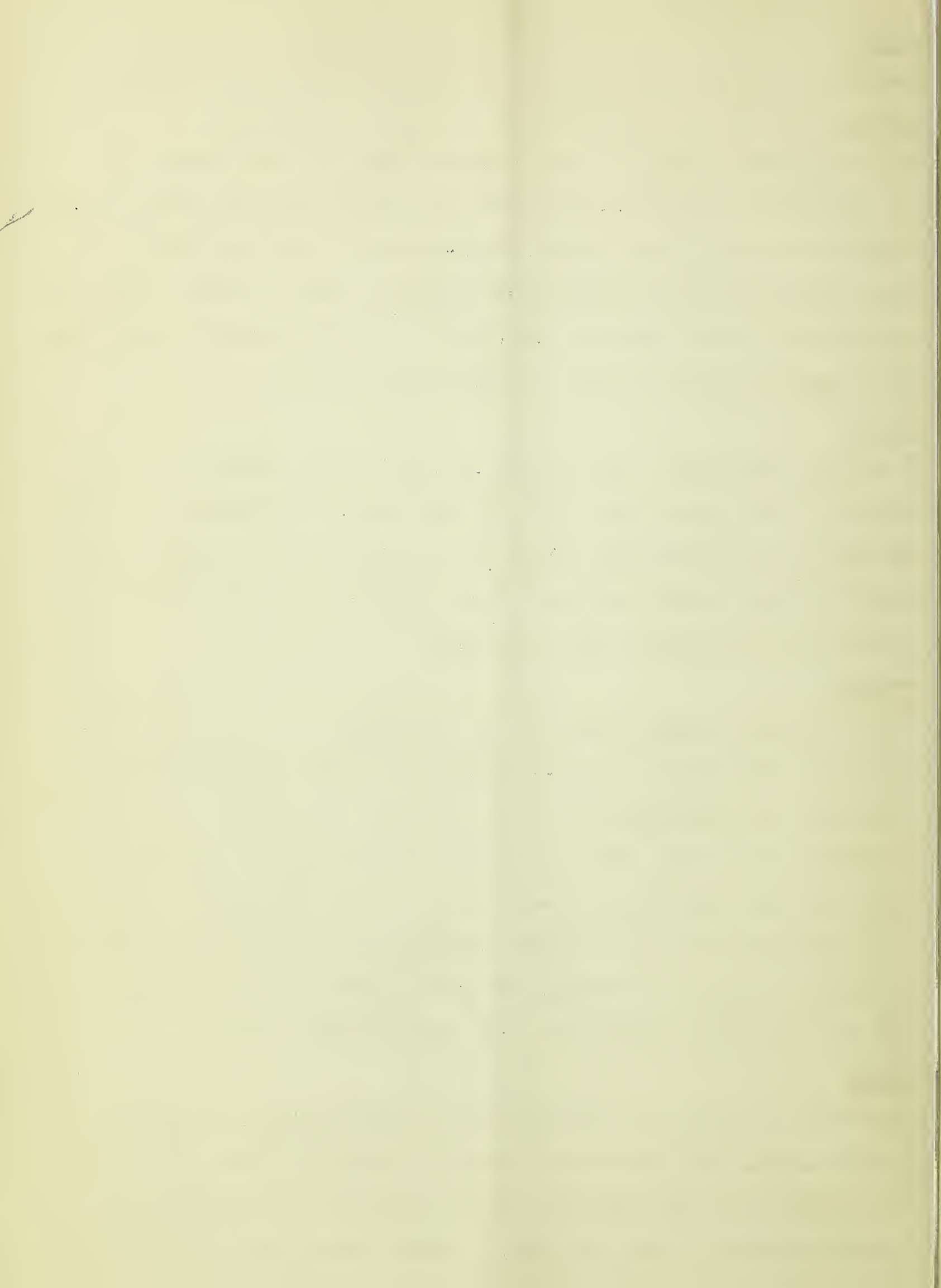
I wonder, sometimes. That brings us back to the question of returning to the land, that which is taken away. You know that people in many areas of the Ohio Valley find it difficult to raise enough money to build their roads and their schools--just because their natural resources have been "skinned."

KRIEBEL

That's a good phrase, return to the land that which is taken away. How about the piles of leaves--millions of them, especially in towns and cities--raked up and burned every fall, when they should be heaped up to rot. Then the rotted material could be scattered back upon the lawn or garden--returned to the land, as it should be. And how about corn stalks? Observations at the soil erosion experiment station at Bethany, Missouri, show that soil erosion can be reduced by leaving the corn stalks in the field.

JONES

There are so many practices that more farmers could adopt, and should adopt. For some time, farmers cooperating with the Soil Conservation Service have been using various kinds of mulch to control erosion. They use straw, manure, legume hay, woods, leaves, brush, salt grass, or what have you.



KRIEBEL

Down south, last month a number of farmers were cutting lespedeza sericea from old patches that matured seed last fall, and using the straw for a mulch. Then there's the practice of burning over. I'm glad to say that the practice is on its way out. Farmers who burn straw stacks are just burning piles of dollar bills. They not only waste that straw, but they destroy the life-giving organic matter in the soil. And hay from a burned-over meadow usually is of inferior quality, and contains more weeds than that from an unburned area. Anyone who studies this dynamic thing, the soil and soil relations, comes to have a profound respect for it. He cannot help seeing it as the fundamental thing in human activity. He sees that certain kinds of soil give rise to certain kinds of living communities.

JONES

Thank you, Ralph M. Kriebel, of Bedford, Indiana. It is through men like you, men who love the soil, that we will build a conservation conscience--a conservation ethic. Now, back to Paul Allison.

ALLISON

And to our farm friends: If you would like a copy of the latest bulletin on soil conservation applicable to your community, drop a letter or a penny postcard to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. That address again, Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio.

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ALLISON

Fortunes Washed Away is a studio presentation of the agriculture department of the Nation's Station.

